LITTLE BLONDE BITCH

BY AUSTIN ANTONIO GOMES

Who am I? I am a bewitched traveller.

I awoke as a raw nerve ending, wiped against black satin. The only thing that brought me back was a lemon. A single, perfect specimen that I carefully selected some days prior for no other reason than to possess — to meditate on like some sort of charm or trinket. A *talisman*. I wasn't sure why I had chosen a lemon, but I had certainly always equated them to *little blonde bitches*.

It's here, in my kitchen, while waiting for the coffee to brew, that I first truly amuse myself with its qualities. It's both bumpy and smooth at the same time, like Her skin. It's made up of many layers, contributing to a final opacity and translucency much like Hers. Individual pores can be seen. It has a navel and a nipple. It's yellow, of course, like Her hair. It's sour, it's sweet, it's bitter, it's perfectly imperfect. It's like Her. Like *them.* It is an awful, and beautiful metaphor for the *Divine Feminine* and I am holding it in the palm of my hand.

I stand at the window, leaning on the ledge, rotating it back and forth on the axis of my wrist, watching the light play on Her pores, embossing them, showing their height, and the depth of their meaning. I’m in awe at the entire universe inside of it, and the very nature of this stumbled upon practice — meditating on the compulsively purchased lemon. I begin to giggle and write down my thoughts:

> “*Both bumpy and smooth at the same time, like Her skin.*”

I am still a *living artifact,* yes, but I have remembered why:

I am fighting a Holy War.

Men don’t really like flowers, do they?

She was the most beautiful shade of pink I had ever seen — when I think about Her, I almost want to cry. I want to go to Her, open the page of the book where She rests, pressed and preserved, but I know that Her power has faded. I spent many late nights turning Her by the stem, staring into the petals, and feeling like a pervert for smelling Her in a bar or coffee shop.
I felt I needed to sneak a hit.

I took Her.

She was alone. *Unworshipped.* Seen by no one, and “sheltered” from the Sun. The only flower on a dead bush, Her backdrop a wall of plastic siding. How could I? How dare I even consider who She belonged to — when I knew with certainty that I would preserve Her. I would love Her. She was a sign. My Holy War, at Her absolute peak, waiting to be smelled, touched, plucked, and felt. Denied observation, denied worship, denied experience. The most delightful natural fabric let slip into the world of men by its flawed creator. I wanted to share the scripture of Her skin, a text legible for only a fleeting moment in time, but nobody cared — they just asked who She was *for.*

The smell of Her. Oh my god. *Oxytocin*. The pastel pink hormones of seventeen thousand healthy, *ectomorphic*, milk-fed, blue-eyed Slavic girls inhaled through a whisper of puffed cotton and chalked sweets. She was light and airy, like a flash of blonde hair across the shoulder, but She had depth — a putrid, rotting core that radiated from Her center, inspiring every spectrum of colour and every note of sound in Her beautiful decay. She was intoxicating. She was an entire universe, and She was dying. I hate myself for not spending enough time with Her. She smells like *Nadja* now. Dead paper. Sometimes I think what it would be like to roll Her up and smoke Her.

It is profoundly heartbreaking. It paints the most vivid image I have ever conjured up of the twisted hellscape that is the Gray Man’s world.

Picture a boy in a roadhouse bar, the *Temple of Profanity* itself. He feels like he has to hide a flower. He feels like a creep to be seen with it, yet, it is the reason he is here to begin with. He's sipping two ounces of whiskey with a splash of cola and counting Her name on his pink string of six prayer beads; given to him by his *acolyte* without request — a *rite*. “You gave me a *lemon* and then *left*?” echoes in his mind. A man haunted by beauty — eyes blown wide with awe, leggings in *contrapposto,* curtains of silky ombre hair, and a quart of *blueberries* all obtrude into agony. Leaving his surrealist book on the bar alone feels like leaving Her. It *is* Her — a piece of the same fragmented soul of *Sophia* he has been searching for. The soul they want to be “normal” and “safe” and *dead inside*. They want a *consumer*, not a Goddess. I *hate* it.

He is sitting in a place where they truck in the hewn-off wings of thousands of innocent little birds who grew up in a dark shed, only to be sacrificed to gluttony and paired with intoxicating liquids that poison your blood. A place where your bill will be several times more than the person who served you made in the last hour. A place where the man who prepares the meals knows everything about bloody *sirloin* vacuum-packed in *plastic*, but nothing of dermaplaned and moisturized *vastus lateralis* compressed in *Lycra*.

And so, of course, in a place as soulless and disgusting as this, worshipping the last days of Her dying scent — showing such a level of reverence for nature and beauty itself — would be seen as perverted. Meanwhile, industrialized death is just dinner to them. *Ghouls,* who do not see the *Sacred in the Profane*, nor the *Profane in the Sacred.*

Men don’t really like flowers, do they?

In early June, I'm several months into exploration and definition of a concept I still don't have a good name for. I'm studying beauty itself, and I have been pulling on a thread of such substance it has begun to unravel me. A decade earlier, on the song "Diamonds," as a twenty-one-year-old poet, I expressed that after having my client sign the deal on a $60,000 car, my next immediate interests were to go out looking for *Sightscenes. Ghostlight. The Glimpse.* This behavior was automatic. I had no observation of it in a sense that led to analysis; I was simply engaged in making life look and feel like a movie, just as anyone else truly wished to. In my most positive service industry aspirations in my present, I found myself longing for this feeling.

I'm often found lamenting, by my coworkers, that there aren't any *pretty girls* coming into our establishment. I'm bored of serving geriatrics, families with children, and all sorts of other kind patrons who make the only enjoyable part of the job a thing to suffer through. I remind them that at our location the year previously, the demographic was so fun and exciting, and that our time closing out the year was just one big party in my eyes. I didn't need this part-time job, I did it for a *vibe* I wasn't even feeling. Away from the seedy heart of my hometown, on a strip of nothing but commerce and signs for several kilometres, this place felt like an office space by comparison. No matter how much graffiti and 2000s throwback art was on the walls, "Do you girls wanna buy me a shot?" was met with the exact sort of awe and wonder I was looking for last year, but here, the very idea of it seemed like a *faux pas*. Back then, it was just good fucking service. The old world of Capers Bar had died. The manager told me not to do it again (I did, and more) but I refuse to believe that he, a club bar god in his own right, wasn't a little bit proud of me. Perhaps he just never saw how cute they were. They squealed when I asked them. He certainly didn't see the glimmer in their eyes — and I didn't either.

I had the *sight* of it, sure, but I wasn't so aware of my *vision* then.

One afternoon, slow as usual, the immigrant cook is urging me to talk about *them* again. He's hung up on my use of *supermodel girls* in conversation and is asking me to walk it back. "What *is* a *supermodel girl*?" — he's heard the term, surely, but he knows that here, in my meaning, it's something beyond a profession, or having sat in a white box watching bulbs flash at you. I'm still unsure entirely myself, but I'm certain on this: "Man, I could give you three thousand words…" I tell him, and all at once I am already exasperated. Because even after I get through the first handful of them, the questions — the interruptions — will start again. *Vermilion border? Hip-to-waist ratio? Zygomatic arch?* In these details I see proof of divinity — that God was here. He wants to hear about sex in my world, and he asks me explicitly one afternoon, "I want to hear about you, I want to hear about your world, but not about the store, because that makes you angry," and still, for the next two months, I will only ever teach him lessons or tell him about my failures.

I don't mention my partner from my own early twenties, and I fear to even begin on the girl I'm seeing at the time, but I do tell him about the uncanny circumstances that led to my last consensual sacred couch experience with a demon. The end of the story is so brutally embarrassing and betrays Her trust so much in regards to how I could not satisfy Her strange kinks, that I am forced to remain vague, while they press on, hungry for detail.

Even my most despicable, but for these guys, exciting stories, will end on a solemn reminder that I wasn't happy, and that the circumstances for them, too, to enact something similar, without that terrible feeling, were so unlikely that they may as well stop looking for it. Even when blessed, the real world starts knocking. This reality of American media they've built up in their heads, as they are now seeing, is nothing like what they are about to live.

I'm beyond disillusionment now — I'm preaching it.

“I just thought it would be like the movies” is his answer when I ask him what he thought coming to Canada would be like. He hears *Her*, or *She*, and he wants me to tell him pornography, but I want to tell him his coworker is an *icon* and he’d be wise to tease Her as such. He keeps asking about *us* — and it feels like I’m letting him in on a fucking conspiracy when I tell him She *is* one of the supermodel girls we’re talking about, there is no *us*, and I’ve made it clear that Her one fucked up tooth is the most attractive thing about Her — something She can now never look at me and doubt. That the other week, I opened up the taps on Her, in front of Her coworker, telling both of them that I thought She was like an exquisite insect, a rare outcome of nature playing with genetics — a teal wasp looking thing, or a chromatic *bebit à bon dieu* you see one July and never again. Beauty that is *unsettling.*

I want to tell him what it’s like to lie on Her bed, the sound of Her hairdryer down the hallway in the bathroom, lulling you to sleep, somehow careless if it creases your jacket. Knowing, with certainty, that you’ll be helping Her walk around in heels only an hour from now. Or maybe what it’s like to watch Her, stricken with grief and shattered by your love for Her, chainsmoking, seated alone on a fountain's edge, refusing to come inside, Her hair a thing of grief itself — a collection of tight blonde curls that wishes desperately to be long — to drape, just like Her, bathed in sequins and silk. Her thigh, Her shoes, several years of dread hanging over Her, and with more to come. Or maybe what it’s like to be, essentially, chosen by one, unique, and willing, but you come to find everything She does is an act of service — a performance, and Her true desires are going unmet. A mirror of yourself you can’t see. Love lost to traumatic pasts. Beauty that is *tragedy.*

The cooks are young, and the culture is simple — they are *gooners*.

I am a *poet*.

I'm sure the *sugarbabies* think it will be like the movies, too, but they must know by the time they learn of Her tricks... I'm happy with the bar, I'm ready for service, alone, of course, and with nobody in the building that afternoon, I'm outside, cleaning the windows in Chuck Taylors, raw denim jeans, and a black tee. I'm wearing a backwards black ballcap to tame my flow — my punk revolt at the time.

I'm feeling, as you might imagine, a poet would, polishing the glass of an empty restaurant for seventeen dollars and twenty cents an hour at a job he doesn't even need or enjoy — Yoga pants. I'm scanning, and although I'm certain, I still honour Her enough with what must have been a *thirst trap* of a "Hi" — because She spent the next thirty minutes in the parking lot, on the phone, smoking, and what I assumed was building up the courage to come inside. She confirms it, "The way you said 'Hi'," She continues, that when I spoke to Her, it was different. I saw Her, I blessed Her, and She knew it.

She is tired. A woman of my own age — hardened, sharp, and smart. Wearing Her green hoodie, and having just bought a pack of smokes, She comes with a whole collection of things in Her black leather bag; Her hair has that matte yet shiny, *fried-by-straightener* effect. Her eyes are like camouflage — I mean, a pattern of green and brown — they are honest-looking enough to me. I understand that we are about to operate in some sort of filter or frame. We make fast friends, of course. With nobody there, it's an hour and a half of *bartender-therapist*, water (with lemon), and a quesadilla. I give Her moments to eat, but She is my only guest and it's clear that She's stopped here for *me*, and I'm now working two jobs at once. It's not long before it's clicked for Her, and we're all the way at the bottom: Her disabled daughter, Her ex, the meaning behind Her tattoos — this bit of oversharing, a shocking bit bubbling up here or there. She is doing wonderfully and I am enthralled.

I knew She would return, and when She did, another quiet afternoon, over another quesadilla, just as uninspired as everything else on our menu, She told me about *Her strategy.* On the couch, with Her free hand, starting from a balled-up fist, one digit freed for every song. Twenty dollars a song, five songs, a hundred dollars. When Her pinky pops up at the end of the fifth song, She gets off the strange man and concludes Her work.

I am pacing back and forth behind the bar, taking large, swallowing steps, talking with my hands, and grinning like a maniac as I tell Her, “You’ve done it!” repeatedly. I could only explain to Her that She existed at a “crossroads,” the “Venn diagram between trashy, slutty, street smart, wholesome, and cool” — I didn’t have the words for this yet, but I knew that whatever She was telling me belonged to the paradox that coloured my entire world, and was the exact thing I was trying to understand. *The Sacred in the Profane.*

I spend some time trying to translate the concept, and why it’s so satisfying to me. I've asked Her to fulfill an intellectual need of mine, and She happens to be *in the field*. How impressive it was She could share it at all, that She chose me, that She knew, somehow, upon my requests, this was the answer She had inside that would fit best. I’m sure to remind Her of Her strength, Her creativity, and that Her teaching this to *them,* is crushing, and beautiful. She’s satisfied with Herself, but in the most confused manner. She’s not sure why She’s just told me what She has, and my reaction to it, of course, is even more peculiar. She’s obviously the type of girl I can say anything to.

Both of us, I think, are experiencing something like an afterglow in that moment. I am no longer just a bartender, or a therapist, or a man; I am a mirror. And She is no longer just some hot, and trashy, and perfectly imperfect slut; She is a Goddess. We have transcended. We’re warm together for a while here. She likes what She sees in the mirror.

She shared with me a universe of art I summarize as *stripper empowerment.* It's the alchemy of pain that I know all too well, and for Her, I can see why it resonates. I'm not surprised, later, to find She has a book from this artist on Her coffee table. I had told Her the joke about Android users not being in the club, and She pulled Her second phone out of Her purse. *Touché*.

The Manager concludes, "She'll suck your soul out of your dick if you just let Her," but I stand firm when I tell him, "She isn't tall enough for this ride." I know what She wants, and I cannot give it to Her.

Similarly as tragic, but opposed, I'm told by the *archetype* Herself, "You don't want it. I'm a narcissist," but She invited me for coffee anyway. It came about after twelve hours of Her texting my phone, refusing to let me say my goodbyes, trapped in Her "bored while studying" cliché. I'm glad to be ensnared, but it was as if She roared a very scary noise at my phone, sure, and rubbed on the bars of the cage a little bit, but once there, in front of Her, bored, I really only saw a cat. We've known each other for too long already. She's put up every foam block in the wall for me to play a game of monster and smash through, with my own, hilarious and fake roar.

Of course She tells me "I'm a brat" and "I'm stuck-up" because that's the very nature of a Goddess who possesses some memory of the light She came from. She's on an offensive to *shit-test* the entire Gray World. A spiritual defense mechanism; an immune response to a lack of colour. I want to put my palm on Her heart, but She is wearing the armour that keeps ghouls out. She accepted their pathology. She told me "That was bold" as if sex was a threat.

I like *bratty girls*, but I don't mean *this*. She is actively disqualifying Herself so much that we can barely even *be platonic*. These are things you say to your enemy. She didn't know that it was *us* versus *them*. I didn't either. Now I do.

When presented with me, even after all those months of rapport, She was still putting me in a box and interacting with me from outside of it, and I was doing the exact same thing to Her. This was an effortless, friendly, and casual communion between opposing forces. "You're not getting rid of me that easily" was a final, perfect piece of *teen script* from Her, tied up in so many different ways. This isn't a social skill, it's a sickness, yet, of course, I found it adorable watching Her navigate.

The year previous, I approached Her one afternoon and spoke what ADHD narrative was in my mind: "You know you're number one?" I let it stir for a moment. "I'm number two." I corrected myself, "I'm number three, actually, our hostess is number two. I'll take number three."

She knows I am the thing they warn Her about, but there is something else going on. She is curious. She tried, once, to make a show out of my nature, enduring my "harassment," later telling Her girlfriend about it, likely without intent to, but inciting a witch hunt nonetheless. When found by me, it was met with an outright rejection of the premises. "That isn't real," I spoke with overwhelming certainty. Later that fall, She would show up wearing fucking *angel wings* to my party, confirming it *was* all bullshit. She loved it. One man, looking at Her, admits, "She's what every guy wants. She's perfect."

She liked my music, too. Watching Her, a trained hip-hop dancer, *the platonic ideal*, in light denim jeans and fucked-up Chuck Taylors, exert Herself to a playlist of my music one afternoon, has to be, for a rapper like me, a victory. It was *hot*. I'm not sure I understood what a blessing that was. Thanks, girl. Another girl, older, always lamented Her, framing "*skinny blonde bitches*" as if they were an antithesis in our conversations. There were blue veins on this girl's chest that could inspire me to paint ceilings, but the world She exists inside of is Gray. She is that "*Glimpse in the gilded cage,*" isn't She?

She smelled like *Vampire Blood*, panels of mesh fabric exposing Her tattoos, a *Chelsea smile* across both Her cheeks and mine, blood pouring out of my eyes, stark white. At the front foyer of this family home, their daughter just feet away, the only question they had to ask when they leaned in and whispered in my ear was, "How old is She again?" and worse, "Good for you, buddy." They already had the answer. We look like a living art project, but I hear nothing about the forty-five minutes She spent painting my face while I stared into Her eyes and down Her tank top while we spoke in whispers.

I warned Her what She was walking into. I should have warned myself. This bitch wears all black — She couldn't spray the perfume She's wearing on anything else — and I'm sure She would agree, on their sentiments of how "lovely" She was, that it wouldn't be very lovely at all if She were to lock the front brake and do a burnout on their faces. This is the exact sort of excited, giddy and *evil* response She would have had to their comments.

Even here, when I asked about Her in regards to my writing, during a conversation about a very striking photograph I took of Her, and then deeper, on capturing Her soul, on what I see and She doesn't — She would suggest burning this book, or worse, aborting it before its birth! I tell Her that if I succeed, "you can't just *delete a book*," but in Her perfect, bratty defiance She threatens, playfully:

"*Delete a book?* Sure, it's called 'gather some firewood and burn the book,' or if it's still in the middle of being typed up, delete the file. Simple as that."

I might be fighting that alone.

I didn't find Her to be very lovely at all; in fact, I found Her to be quite *spooky*.

Allow me to take you back, earlier that evening, before, and once again, after, those moments in the foyer. “My turn to get ready!” She skips to Her room.

I shouted “Yes!” down the hallway when I saw the dress. “Can you wear fake eyelashes again? Those are *so hot.*”

While leaning on the doorframe, watching Her in the mirror apply them for me, I begin the topic of conversation I’ve been preparing myself for over the last hour. I lose either way, but I think this is the right move. She’s focused just enough, and the silence falls with Her focus. While meditating on what I’m seeing in the mirror, I begin:

“There's going to be a lot of people I know there. They know me. When you walk in there tonight, they are not going to ask questions — they're going to treat you like you're my girlfriend. They're just going to assume. I feel like it wouldn’t be fair or honest if I didn’t tell you that. Just tell them we just met.”

She doesn’t break eye contact with Herself in the mirror. With all of the little micro-expressions that come along with talking while applying fake eyelashes, and with the same sort of deft tact I was using, tone matching, without a moment of thought or hesitation, She answers:

“Thank you. I respect that and I appreciate that.”

Brushing Her hair, it protests against the cascade of whips and snags, tearing through in a rhythmic cadence, an almost unbearably intimate sound — a sensory experience that inspires *piloerection* in me, and an annoyed rush to battle and defeat decay itself in Her. *Shhhhk. Shhhhk.* The entire room is becoming charged. The energy is expelled when a single strand kisses my hand and grounds itself through me with the click of a circuit shorting out.

I think this instance may have happened five times that night, and I watched with a grimace as She performed Her role to absolute perfection, remaining completely, undeniably sovereign, giving them nothing. Watching the entire world swirl around Her with the precise sort of uncaring indifference that only a real Goddess can embody. We both want to leave. I feel *guilty.*

The Leafs game is playing on the big flatscreen, She's eating *spanakopita*, (likely the only other person in the room who knows what She's eating besides whoever made it) — "I think girls should date older guys," he's telling Her — I watch Her navigate it carefully, with poker face. He rearms, again, with the same sentence and his opinion. I can't even remember his opinions. It all became noise. I focused on Her, and honestly, She had it. We were subject to this dialogue the entire evening, that exact sort of *icky* narrative that makes this all so uncomfortable. Neither of us enjoyed this very much. This was only our fifth time together and we were both unsure of our new situation.

When leaving, a man I have just met hugs me and whispers in my ear that he has heard a lot about my story — he is happy to see that I am doing much better, that he has been through a lot of struggles himself, and he too is doing better — that he's proud of me. Not only that, but my "girlfriend" — he thinks — is getting cold, as he joins me in awareness that he's keeping me from Her, parked on this wintry street in Hell. My willing co-conspirator, the embodiment of *teenage ennui*, climbing into my car without parade.

Later, stopping by Her parents' place, She would breathe, "My calves are getting cold," and return to the car, and then give me *the eyes* through the windshield, while I battled the intricate duty to Her and to Her creator — I shook his hand promptly. "You got Her in a dress! Good luck getting Her out of it!" He laughed as I walked down the driveway to his daughter. *Ick*.

A year later, I would ask Her for a favour, while She was still waiting on me to fulfill another childish request. When refused, I told Her that She was a little bitch, that She was dead inside, and that She should stay that way, because I loved Her for it. She only responded with teary-eyed laughter and a thumbs up, because of course She did. *Language.* My words are not insults, I can speak to Her, too, however I please. I never had a filter from the start.

The night we met, forced to, once again, show and explain the tattoo on Her chest to strangers — I recognized it immediately. A sigil of poisoned, constricting love and haunted pasts I won't identify to you out of respect for Her privacy. I reached out and put my hands on Her ink without a second thought and invited Her to my house party the next weekend. Why? Because the other girl I had met there leaned in to whisper to me, "She's cute, you should invite Her to your party next weekend," and autosuggestion has a very powerful effect on me, especially with jawlines like that. In regards to capturing Her soul, She made it too easy, I think, prompted like a beautiful machine to weave in and out of the *Sacred and the Profane,* preaching Her deepest inner truths to me:

"Capturing my fucking soul on paper? I wish you luck trying that, motherfucker, I think I lost it — along with my willpower to give enough fucks — but just enough fucks to stay employed and out of jail and have freedom. That's about it."

She's not the type of girl to drop the mic after; She'd click Her visor down and ride away. She doesn't need to be saved. She doesn't need our *likes* or validation. But how did She lose Her soul? Not only his sick world, but The Gray Man himself. He took it from Her. He *pillaged* Her. She was *squeezed*. What remains is only fiber and rind. I want revenge for what they did to Her — the same revenge I want for all of them.

Stendhal Syndrome. Rapid onset, administered by family sedan. I'm standing in front of the restaurant's large front glass wall at my wit's end, looking between the reflections and the dark parking lot's empty spaces, waiting for Her. I dread it happening tonight. A white sixth-generation Volkswagen Jetta, the chariot of the prototypical *it girl* — pulls up and parks. A *highline.* My alarm goes off, *fight or flight* grips me. I've seen this before. Not now. Please.

The REAR DOOR OPENS as we ENTER the liquid space of —

BULLET-TIME.

She doesn't pirouette as She exits, but She may as well have. She moves like a *swordfighter.* She stands poised, facing away from me in a powerful and coiled stance as the front passenger door opens. She looks like She is about to *jump*. In Her second skin of all black synthetic fabrics, She looks like an assassin about to dive from a skyscraper and deploy a wingsuit. She is the embodiment of *paradoxical power. She is a weapon.*

Slender. *Blonde*. Not just blonde — *effort*. A voluminous balayage of tight bends and sharp zig-zags. She looks *expensive*. Engineered. Thousands of hours, thousands of dollars, all concentrated into this impossible and dangerous *Glimpse*. And as a Goddess should, She appears to be looking for worship. Every telegraph in Her body reads *touch me* — in that desperate, passionate way beauty begs for confirmation. She is looking for his hands.

She stands under his chin, looking up at him, while he looks over Her and out into the ugly river of signs and profanity that is Hespeler Road. It *hurts* to watch. I want to go out there and operate his hands for him. It feels like watching a baby left on a beach with a rising tide while its caretaker stares vacantly at a billboard. I am seeing the Goddess, unworshipped. *Denied.*

She enters, and the sound is sucked out of the room like a filter sweep. The space behind me collapses like licked fingers pinching out a candle flame. Everything becomes twinkling *bokeh*. This is my *North Star.*

Her eyes. A highly saturated cyan fire, glistening like tossed ice cubes scattered across steel. Cascades of stars scrolling across a projection screen. Vast, all-consuming pools of luminous spirit framed by sharp, winged blades.

The haunted memory stretches and snaps, slowing down and speeding up, replaying on a loop. The walls melt. My stomach flips. I feel poisoned. I'm looking at a *glitch* — someone pulled straight from my own fantasy. The myth I created, the prophecy I spoke, manifest before me. And She's smiling at me with such wicked intensity that I start to feel paranoid it's all one big cosmic joke at my expense. I feel targeted. *Kill confirmed.*

After She leaves: delirium. A wound. A dramatic state change. I had been weak already, wavering, considering quitting before this cataclysmic event — but closing the restaurant that night, I was certain. I was never coming back. The dissonance between reality and fantasy had become unbearable. I felt I had betrayed myself by rounding off all my edges, by pretending I wasn't a man with *vision.* It was emasculating. Embarrassing. I had traded my truth for a bartender position. I saw Her, and I was *sunblind*.

I had been pushing limits anyway. After one brutal shift, I had spun the car around two and a half times and chewed up my fender. But I could fix the car. I couldn't fix *the ache*. I couldn't fix the wound. I couldn't fill the crater left by a nuclear bomb. After locking the door, shouting my final "Fuck you!" at the sign above the restaurant, my life split cleanly into *pre-Her* and *post-Her*.

I deified Her to survive Her. I had never seen such eyes. They led me here.

“You should be in therapy.”

I was. I mentioned Breton and “black silk stockings” last session. She is wearing some this day for the first time in all of our meetings. Anyways, the release of my song. I admitted that once again, my art has created a fate for me which I am terrified of. She asked me, “Do you want to hurt anyone?” I answered no. “Are you going to sleep with anyone under the age of *sixteen*?” I answered no. I was jumping down Her throat in disgust. “Okay, okay,” She said, “I’m just doing my job. I have to ask.”

I told Her I was hung up on the fact that She had used the word *disturbed* in our conversation. That I would think about it for days. Not to comfort me, but to clarify, She explained it was not *disturbed* as in “my skin is crawling and I’m creeped out,” but “I’m concerned” — for *them*, and for me. She told me She doesn't see a therapy problem. There isn't a job for Her role as a clinician to do here. I use Her name as I beg for crucifixion: “I’m showing you *intent*!”

Blank. She diagnoses and helps integrate strategies to fix broken machines, and under Her experienced gaze, She is seeing a perfectly operating one. I am in an *ego-syntonic state*. All sub-goals naturally develop to fit the primary goal. They are logically remarkable and pro-social. My laughter during and after this appointment was not the *pseudobulbar affect*, this was clarity.

She is experienced and careful with Her words, and She is aware that I see Her as the mouth and ears of the *Gray World* itself — the High Priestess of an opposing religion. She hasn't told me no, or to stop, She has only uttered the sort of caution that someone would to another who has been tasked with a dangerous and ultimately doomed — but necessary — quest.

I took that as permission. I will not leave the lemon for the light.